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Extension Education Worldwide

trends, challenges and
cases

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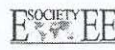
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21st ESEE
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Coordinated by
Orhan Özçatalbaş
with the collaboration of
International Scientific and Organizing Committee

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Agricultural Advisory Services Between National and Donors' Policy Frameworks in Benin

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Abstract

With the liberalisation since early 1990s, different types of organisation - i.e. NGO, farmer, private and public organisations - provided agricultural advisory services (AAS) in most Sub Saharan Africa. Farmer organisations and NGOs were especially promoted through projects funded by international donors. Stakeholders, driven by the Ministries of Agriculture and donors, adopted national strategies for agricultural advisory services. In Benin, this policy document outlined the objectives, the guiding principles and provision mechanisms of advisory services. On behalf of pluralistic AAS, many AAS projects were developed in the framework of bilateral cooperation. Public organisations, in charge of the coordination of interventions, had to take care that any intervention fits within the national policy. In this article, we wonder whether the implementation of AAS at grassroots level was influenced by national stakeholders, donors' policies, operational service providers or rather by farmers. We selected three NGO (CADG, GERED and LARES), one farmer organisation (FUPRO) and one public organisation (CeCPA-Bohicon) providing AAS with different financing arrangements for comparative case studies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders of these AAS organisations, advisers and farmers to complement policy document review. We addressed their AAS governance mechanisms, approaches and methods. We found that donors highly influenced the implementation of AAS through the project-led AAS mechanisms. This resulted into a diversity of AAS approaches implemented, with sometimes non observance of some guiding principles stated in the national policy. However, operational service providers including their field agents had, not full, but a certain degree of freedom for adapting services to local conditions. As consequence, different providers supported by the same donor could make use of different strategies to meet farmers' needs. Farmers had less influence on the implementation of AAS. Still much is to be done for promoting a real farmer-led AAS.

Keywords: Agricultural advisory services, Benin, Governance, Policy framework

INTRODUCTION

With the liberalisation since early 1990s, different types of organisation - i.e. NGO, farmer, private and public organisations - provided agricultural advisory services (AAS) in most Sub Saharan Africa (Carney 1998, Katz 2002). These stakeholders, under the leadership of the Ministries of Agriculture and donors, adopted national strategies for agricultural advisory services. Farmer organisations and NGOs were especially promoted through projects funded by international donors (Puplampu and Tettey, 2000). Many AAS systems were established. The involvement of many stakeholders in financing and the development of many advisory services providers strengthened the need for relevant governance systems. Debate on the AAS governance was related to the distribution of roles among stakeholders and how to improve the effectiveness of services (Faure et al. 2012). Diverse paradigms such as participatory extension, demand-driven services, market-driven services or farmer-led extension were developed to guide extension work towards addressing farmers' concerns or meeting farmers' needs (Schmidt et al. 1998). While private service providers operate in profitable sectors, governmental and non government organizations should focus on poor farmers, food security issues (Anderson and Feder, 2004). In addition government was expected to play regulation and coordination role. In many West African countries, new AAS policies were made to provide stakeholders with guideline principles.

In Benin, the National Strategy for Agricultural Advisory Services (SNCA) was adopted. Building on the experiences of the Farming Systems Improvement and Diversification Project (PADSE) which served as pilot project, the SNCA identifies the objectives AAS, key stakeholders and their roles, three strategic orientations, four types of AAS and six principles to guide service provision. General principles in AAS provision in Benin (MAEP, 2008):

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- Contracting: Clients of the AAS should better control, appreciate and approve the services they are being supplied with. According to this principle, farmers receive vouchers to pay service providers depending on their level of satisfaction.
- Subsidiarity: The management and the supply of AAS should be assigned to the lowest level structure.
- Complementarity: Thanks to permanent dialogue, AAS activities organized by all stakeholders should be complementary so as to have synergy in the intervention.
- Free adherence: Clients of AAS should be heads of farm, volunteers and available to participate in activities, accept farm and home visits from AAS agent and be open to discussion and innovations.
- Mutual trust: the advisor and the farmer should trust each other.
- Co-financing of AAS: All the AAS stakeholders including end-users should contribute to financing AAS provision. Progressively, the beneficiaries, through their organizations are expected to take over the financing AAS.

The Ministry of Agriculture should control the alignment of any player to these principles. On behalf of pluralistic AAS, many AAS projects were developed in the framework of bilateral cooperation. Public organisations, in charge of the coordination of interventions, had to take care that any intervention fits within the national policy. Service providers are then under triple influence of donors providing funds and expertises, public policy defining principles and local needs and demands of farmers. These three logics can be converging or diverging. In this article, we wonder whether the implementation of AAS at grassroots level was influenced by national stakeholders, donors' policies, operational service providers or rather by farmers.

METHODS

The governance refers to decision making mechanisms for driving AAS system. The paradigm of governance points out the multiplicity of actors involved, the partnerships they establish and the place of farmers and their organization in decision making. Governance mechanisms are all arrangements defining the place and role of each actor in the implementation of AAS policy and strategy. According to the driving forces, there are farmer/demand-, service provider/offer-, down-stream actors/market-, donor/financing-driven AAS. The financing mechanisms seem to determine to a large extent the governance systems and AAS approaches (Faure et al., 2011). In Benin, donors operate through development projects. These projects are usually led by light management multi-stakeholders committee. The projects financed NGO, farmer organizations and less public organizations to implement AAS at grassroots level, generally according to priorities and methodologies they define. To analyse the governance system, we study AAS systems formed by interactions between stakeholders (public organizations, projects, NGO, farmer organization, etc.) to provide farmers with AAS. We focus on the approaches of AAS projects, the roles/strategies of services providers and the involvement of stakeholders in planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Table 1: Case studies

Organizations providing AAS	Types of organization	Donors	Projects / Institutions	Type of AAS and coverage
CeCPA (Bohicon)	Public	MAEP - Benin	DICAF	Technical AAS to all farmers over the country
FUPRO	Farmer organization	AFD -France	PADYP	Management advice to family farm to selected farms in the South
CADG	NGO			Management advice to selected in the North
GERED	NGO	SNV - The Netherlands	PROCOTON	Management advice to selected in the North
LARES	NGO	SDC - Switzerland	ASPAP	Management advice to selected in N'Dali district

We selected three NGO (CADG, GERED and LARES), one farmer organisation (FUPRO) and one public organisation (CeCPA-Bohicon) providing AAS with different financing arrangements (Table 1). It's important to notice that CADG and GERED are two NGO which are under the influence of the same technical staff. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to address AAS governance mechanisms, approaches and methods. In each project, we conducted interviews with the head of AAS department,

three advisors, three farmers-advisers and three farmers selected randomly. Document and discourse analysis was used to understand the approaches of AAS used by projects, the roles/strategies of services providers and the involvement of stakeholders in planning, monitoring and evaluation. We implemented a comparative case study method to analyze similarities and dissimilarities between case studies.

RESULTS

To analyse the importance of stakeholders in AAS governance, we described the understandings/approaches of AAS, the roles/strategies of services providers and the involvement of stakeholders in planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Role of the donor to promote Management Advice

The role of donors to influence AAS is obvious. Management Advice for Family Farms approaches have been promoted in Francophone Africa with the support of French cooperation entities, most notably the French Development Agency (AFD), for nearly two decades. Support from elsewhere in Europe (Belgian, Dutch, Swiss cooperation entities) and involvement of some States have made it possible to adapt the MAFF approach to different contexts. Benin was one of the first countries in West Africa to implement MAFF, starting in 1995 in the framework of pilot projects. MAFF is currently being implemented there with the support of bilaterally funded programmes, such as PADYP (Project to Support Development of Production Dynamics) funded by the AFD. Advice is provided by nearly a dozen NGOs who have acquired extensive experience in MAFF, by farmer organizations such as FUPRO (Federation of Producer Unions of Benin) or by the Ministry of Agriculture which has recruited more than 250 advisers for MAFF. Nearly 20,000 farmers are more or less involved in MAFF in Benin.

Basically the MAFF adviser conducts group advisory sessions and also monitors farmers individually. Work is organized using a multi-phase management cycle (analysis, planning, decision/action, monitoring, and evaluation) with frequent adviser-farmer interactions. MAFF is implemented in a flexible and gradual manner. The adviser uses a farm-diagnosis phase to identify farmer requirements and orient activities. He then organizes collective training on farming techniques (fertilization of maize, cotton pest control, regulation of blooming of pineapple, etc.). He also trains them management concepts and the use of corresponding tools (harvested crop management, crop-season planning, cash flow planning, revenue-expenditure accounts, etc.). In this way, MAFF encourages farmers to reflect, helps them in forecasting and trains them to use techno-economic indicators (gross margin, costs/income ratio, etc.). This helps the farmer analyze the results and the performance of his farm. During the crop season, the adviser ensures individual monitoring of farmers in their fields to provide additional training and targeted advice. At the end of the season, a first analysis of the technical and economic results, both at crop production level and entire farm level, is undertaken with farmers in group meetings. Some advisers use computers to perform additional processing on the data of the farmers. These more accurate results are then presented and discussed with each farmer. Based on the results of the previous crop season, the advisers and farmers together plan the following crop season. Under the MAFF approach, exchanges between farmers are encouraged through various collective activities (training, group meetings to discuss results, field visits to share experiences, innovation trials in farmers' plots, etc.).

MAFF differentiates itself from extension, which is aimed primarily at transferring knowledge and new technologies to farmers, especially in the domain of agricultural production. The MAFF approach is similar to that of 'Farmer Field Schools' in that it promotes farmer learning. It does so, however, by focusing on the farmer and his family farm (and not mainly on crop production) through technical and economic analyses.

Understandings and approaches of AAS

Within the same MAFF framework, discourse analysis of service providers revealed that the providers' understandings/approaches of AAS are different with regard to thematic focus, the emphasis to be given to alphabetisation, the orientation of AAS towards farmers' needs and the social function devoted to AAS (Table 2).

- Thematic focus: The AAS providers we investigated dealt with farm management and accounting. FUPRO and CADG diversified the thematic portfolio of AAS by including farming techniques. In addition, FUPRO addressed market issues. CeCPA also included farming techniques learning, but through establishing linkages to specialists.

- Emphasis on alphabetisation: More than the other service providers, GERED/CADG and FUPRO consider alphabetisation as key element of AAS and consequently organized literacy courses.

- AAS social function: GERED/CADG, LARES and FUPRO are involved in promoting solidarity among farmer organizations around both self-organized financing of farming activities and farmer-to-farmer training systems. CADG promoted farmer solidarity through farmer-to-farmer training systems only.

Table 2 shows AAS approaches implemented by service providers, based on the discourse of their management staffs.

Table 2: AAS approaches implemented by organisations

AAS Providers	AAS approaches
CeCPA	We focus our AAS on farm management skills development. With regard to farmers' other needs, we link them to others matter specialists from our organization or not.
FUPRO	Our AAS aims at meeting any farmer's expectations and focuses on agricultural techniques, farm management tools and marketing. Therefore, we provide literacy courses to interested farmers. We support farmer self organized microcredit services and small poultry enterprises.
CADG	Our AAS aims at meeting any farmer's (literate or not as we provide literacy courses) expectations. It includes agricultural techniques and farm management tools. Advanced farmers were invited to assist the other through farmer-to farmer trainings.
GERED	We oriented our AAS towards training of farmers for recording any operation undertaken in their farms. We also promote solidarity among farmers who are advised and supported to organized « alphabetisation » and microcredit services for themselves.
LARES	The AAS we provide aims at promoting solidarity among farmers who are then invited to provide support each other for developing good control of decision making tools, broadening trainings and organizing microcredit services for themselves.

The AAS approaches developed by AFD-funded organizations (FUPRO and CADG) are similar with respect to their broader thematic focus and the solidarity function devoted to AAS. Both AFD-funded organizations are dissimilar with regard to the place of alphabetisation in the AAS. GERED and CADG, leaded by the same staff and funded by different donors, were different on the scope of the thematic focus. GERED/CADG covered fewer issues but included alphabetisation as key activity.

In conclusion donors highly influence AAS through development projects and AAS governance mechanisms. This resulted into differences of AAS approaches implemented by the same technical staff (GERED and CADG for instance). However, service providers had, not full, but a certain degree of freedom in defining their services approaches, regarding local conditions. As consequence, different providers supported by the same donor (CADG and FUPRO for instance) could make use of different approaches to meet farmers' needs.

Strategies of stakeholders in AAS implementation

We looked at the strategies of AAS implementation used by selected service providers (Table 3) with regard to whether they conducted a preliminary diagnostic, the farmer groups they targeted, the roles of field staff members and their alignment with national AAS guiding principle.

Compared to the other AAS providers, AFD-funded service providers implemented almost similar strategies. Indeed, FUPRO and CADG conducted preliminary diagnostics to investigate specific needs of both literate and illiterate farmers while LARES for instance thought that farmers felt similar needs which were already well-known. LARES, operating within the framework of the SDC-funded AAS project, only worked with literate farmers able to manage book-keeping while the others intent to extent MAFF approach to illiterate farmers who represent the majority of farmers. GERED operating within the framework of the SNV-funded AAS project relied on three categories of field workers (advisor, farmer-advisor and supervisor). Supervisors were representatives of farmer organization in charge of controlling advisers' engaged by GERED, with the aim of becoming later full advisors. LARES, FUPRO and CADG relied on two categories (advisor and farmer-advisor) and CeCPA only relies on advisor. Training activities were also conducted by farmers-advisers while their fellows operating under LARES did only retraining, i.e. after the advisor has trained farmers.

No service organization strictly complies with the national AAS principles. The principles of subsidiarity, co-financing and complementarity were less observed. GERED' strategy was more advanced in the implementation of principle of subsidiarity. However we found overlapping of its intervention area with the ones covered by other AFD-funded AAS providers, violating the principle of complementarity.

Table 3: Organizations' strategies and alignment to national AAS principles

AAS provider	Diagnostic	Target groups	Roles of local field staff			Observed principles					
			Adviser	Farmer-adviser	Supervisor	1	2	3	4	5	6
GERED	-	Literate and illiterate cotton farmers	Facilitation Follow-up	Training Follow-up	Control Substitute of advisers	X	X	X		X	
LARES	-	Literate farmers	Training Follow-up	Retraining Follow-up	No supervisor	X		X	X	X	
FUPRO	Yes	Literate and illiterate farmers	Training Facilitation Follow-up	Training Follow-up	No supervisor	X		X		X	
CADG	Yes	Literate and illiterate farmers	Training Facilitation Follow-up	Training Follow-up	No supervisor	X		X		X	
CeCPA	Yes	Literate farmers	Training Follow-up	No farmer-adviser	No supervisor			X		X	

1- Contracting 2- Subsidiarity, 3- Free membership 4- Complementarity, 5- Mutual trust 6- Co-financing

Service providers were all looking for broadening and sustainability of their intervention. While relying all on farmer organizations (farmer-advisers, supervisors, etc.) to get their experiences extended and sustainable, they developed different operational arrangements at grassroots level. These differences seem to be displays of the influence of donors on AAS providers in shaping their intervention strategies. The noticeable dissimilarities between GERED and CADG and the similarities between FUPRO and CADG provide good evidence of this influence.

Involvement of stakeholders in planning processes

We focussed on AAS planning processes to analyze the involvement of stakeholders (Table 4). Except for the public AAS case, the selected providers were funded and operating within the framework of development projects. Such projects were characterized by logical frameworks which clearly mentioned the activities to be done. Any activity to be carried out should fit in the framework of the project. Once AAS providers developed their annual working plans, they sent them to project leaders acting on behalf of the donor for approval. The latter could cancel, add or validate some activities. Staff members and donors were thus highly involved in the planning processes in all our case studies.

Table 4: Levels of involvement of stakeholders in AAS planning processes

AAS providers	Levels of involvement of stakeholders in AAS planning					
	Government	Donors	AAS providers			
			AAS staff	Advisers	Farmers-advisers	Farmers
GERED	-	+++	+++	++	+	+
LARES	-	+++	+++	+++	++	++
CADG	-	+++	+++	++	++	++
FUPRO	-	+++	+++	++	++	++
CeCPA	+++	+++	+++	++		-

+++ : High ++ : Average + : Low - : No involvement

One staff member described the influence of the donors in the planning processes as follows: « The donor is the first partner to whom we send first our action plan. We need to get it approved before implementation. He reserves the right to change anything we suggest. Moreover, the donor needs our action plan to plan his own follow-up plan ». Advisers and farmers-advisers were less involved in the planning processes. They provided staff members with any required information for the planning process. In the implementation of the activities, advisers and farmers-advisers considered farmers' concerns to get them involved as much as possible. Farmers and the government did not play almost any role in the planning of AAS.

The levels of involvement of stakeholders in AAS planning processes were the same for both AFD-funded AAS providers (FUPRO and CADG). Compared to them, LARES involved better its advisers and GERED less its farmers-advisers. The high similarity between providers funded by the same donor, and the

dissimilarities between AAS projects funded by different donors and implemented by the same staff reveal the influential role of the donor in the AAS planning processes. In the case of FUPRO which is managed by farmers' representatives, we did not observe significant differences in AAS provision in terms of content of advice, method to provide advice, or work organization of advisors. One would think that farmer organizations would be in better position to better take into account the needs of farmers.

DISCUSSION

Who finally control the governance of AAS in Benin? We found that donors highly influenced the implementation of AAS through the project-led AAS mechanisms. The State plays a role in AAS by providing advice through the CeCPAs and by promoting public policies. But we observe the quasi-absence of the State in the governance process of the whole AAS in order to guarantee the effective implementation of the principles in AAS provision. It comes from its inability to coordinate AAS projects' activities over the country (Moumouni and Labarthe, 2012) due to a lack of human resources to facilitate coordination processes at local level, a lack of financial resources to support and orient a pluralistic AAS and finally to the autonomy of donor funded projects. This resulted into a diversity of AAS approaches implemented with a limited observance of some guiding principles stated in the national policy.

NGOs, including their field agents, have some room of manoeuvre to adapt their AAS approach depending on their own objectives, values, resources and trajectories. As consequence, different providers supported by the same donor could make use of different strategies to meet farmers' needs. But to obtain contracts and to survive they need both to provide high quality services which are recognized by farmers and to accept the terms of reference of donors funded projects. In fact this room of manoeuvre is limited. The Farmers' Organizations are not really able to influence the AAS provision because they lack human capacities to fully participate in the designing and monitoring of projects. There is no formal and operational mechanism (multi-stakeholders platform, steering committee, etc.) provided for this purpose at neither national nor local level. They also face material and psychological difficulties for directly financing and thus controlling the AAS provision (Faure et al. 2011). Such a case study reveals both the fragile situation of the farmers' organizations which sees the AAS as an opportunity to obtain funds, and the influence of external actors to define the AAS approach. Finally, farmers participating in AAS activities had few influence on the implementation of AAS. They can select some topics among those proposed by the advisor or influence the calendar of the advisor.

Consequently, agricultural advisory services were provided to farmers without sufficiently taking into account their specific needs and knowledge. Such an approach does not value enough endogenous management knowledge, logic and practices (Moumouni et al. 2011). Still much is to be done for promoting a real farmer-led AAS. For the AAS to meet farmers' expectations and to be of interest for them, farmers should be involved in designing AAS approaches, implementation strategies and activity planning as suggested by Cerf and Meynard (2006).

CONCLUSION

This study addressed the issue of the governance of AAS through analyzing the AAS providers' approaches, their strategies in AAS implementation and the participation levels of stakeholders in AAS planning processes. Basing on comparative analysis of five case studies in Benin, the study pointed out the influence of donors in AAS governance process through projects mechanisms. Mechanisms for improving farmers' contribution to the governance, as beneficiaries or clients of AAS, should be established. In addition, shortcomings in the government coordination system which reduce the participation of public organizations in the governance should be appropriately addressed.

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